

Name: _____ Date: _____ Section: _____

What Did You Do in School?

A Scribe's Exercise, "School days," About 2000 B.C.E.

In answer to the question, "What did you do in school?" a Mesopotamian schoolboy describes his day. We can see that it was a day school where he lived at home, that discipline was strict, and that the lessons were made up almost entirely of practicing writing on clay tablets.

Although children were required to speak Sumerian at school and this exercise was written in Sumerian, it was not spoken in most homes at the time. Akkadian had become the spoken language of Mesopotamia. At the beginning of this section, the boy is growing tired of school, but the description ends with the teacher telling the boy that he is a good student and will benefit from his education. This text was used as a writing assignment for boys in schools for scribes.

What kind of source are you about to read? _____

I recited my tablet, ate my lunch, prepared my (new)¹ tablet, wrote it, finished it; then my model tablets were brought to me; and in the afternoon my exercise tablets were brought to me....

My headmaster read my tablet and said: "There is something missing."
He **caned**² me....

The fellow in charge of silence said: "Why did you talk without permission?" He caned me....

The fellow in charge of Sumerian said: "Why didn't you speak Sumerian?" He caned me....

¹ Because the clay tablets on which people wrote were damaged over time, historians sometimes have to interpret what they think was written. Places where the cuneiform could not be read and the writing is interpreted are indicated with parentheses.

² **caned** – beat with a stick

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My teacher said: "Your handwriting is unsatisfactory." He caned me. I (began to) hate the scribal art, (and began to) neglect the scribal art....

The teacher was brought from school, and after entering in the house, he was seated on the 'big chair.' I attended and served him, and whatever he learned of the scribal art, he unfolded to my father. Then did the father in the joy of his heart say joyfully to the headmaster of the school: "My little fellow has opened (wide) his hand, (and) you have made wisdom enter there; see solutions of the mathematical and arithmetical (problems)...."

The teacher said: "Young fellow, (because) you hated not my words, neglected them not, (you may) complete the scribal art from beginning to end."

ASSIGNMENT:

Imagine you are a student studying at a scribe school in Mesopotamia. Your assignment is to ***either*** write a dramatic dialogue that you imagine could occur at your school, ***or*** create a short comic strip that reflects something that might have happened in scribe school.